

Christian Messenger.

HALIFAX, N. S., APRIL 16, 1873.

THE TEACHER.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1873.

SUNDAY, April 20th, 1873.

Joseph sold.—Gen. xxxvii. 23-28.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.” Proverbs xix. 21.

COMMIT TO MEMORY.—Verses 26-28.

SUMMARY.—“The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnashed upon him with his teeth.”

ANALYSIS.—I. In the pit. vs. 23, 24. II. Change of plan. vs. 25-27. The sale. vs. 28.

EXPOSITION.—The Interval.—We left Joseph at home, his two dreams just told, his brethren burning with envious hate, his father pondering on the meaning of the remarkable dreams. The family was at this time living at Hebron. Vs. 14. This was a city of Judah (Jos. xxv. 57), situated among the mountains, twenty Roman miles south of Jerusalem, and the same distance north of Beer-sheba, . . . one of the most ancient cities of the world still existing, and in that respect the rival of Damascus.” Num. xiii. 22. Here Sarah died, and was buried in the cave Macpelah, which is still there within the massive walls of the harem or mosque. Hebron now contains about five thousand inhabitants, and is picturesquely situated in a narrow valley (see vs. 14) surrounded by rocky hills. From this place Joseph was sent by his father to look after his brothers, who had gone to Shechem, or its vicinity, to secure better pasture for their flocks and herds. This place, written also Sichem, was far off to the north in Samaria, between Mount Gerizim and Ebal. It was near this place that our Saviour spake those simple but profound words to the woman of Samaria concerning the water of life, suggested by Jacob's well, at which they were spoken. That Joseph was sent, shows that the father was not aware of the dark murderous hatred which was cherished against his favorite. That he had special reason for anxiety for his sons while in the region of Shechem, will be seen from chapter xxxiv. See especially verses 25-31. Dothan, the place where Elisha had his vision of horses and chariots of fire, 2 Kings vi. 13, was distant from Shechem about twelve miles northward, and could be easily reached. Precisely here is found at the present day, ‘the best pasturage in all that region,’ and thus though the narrative is silent as to the reason why the sons of Jacob went from Shechem to Dothan, we see that it is the very place which herdsmen, such as they were would naturally seek, after having exhausted the supplies of their previous pasture-ground.”—Hackett. It was here that Joseph found them, and here we find both them and Joseph.

Verse 23.—When Joseph was come unto his brethren.” Plainly harboring no ill-will to them, and not suspecting any evil of them, even if he knew of their envy. He doubtless was glad to see them, and came up with a face all beaming with gladness, and probably with a shout and good cheer. But they conspired to murder him when they first saw him far off. Vs. 18. Much of our so-called virtue is due to the constant and extensive and strong restraints of society! This has been all too manifest in California, as it has in the “Oil Regions” of Pennsylvania, and in border settlements, where men who had been counted virtuous and upright, and even Christians, at home, have given loose reins to their unholy passions, because they were no longer held in check by outward influences. There is a terrible power in passion, and it is not enough for us to keep it down, we need new hearts. God's spirit dwelling in us, making us Christ-like. The fountain pure, pure waters will flow out whether one be at home or abroad, in a Christian or heathen community.

Verse 24.—Cast him into a pit or cistern, according to the new plan proposed by Reuben, in place of the first determination, which was to slay him. Vs. 21, 22. It has been suggested that aside from the motive of a more kindly, or rather less murderous spirit than the rest, he, as the oldest, felt special responsibility for the boy's safety. The rest thought that he, like them, intended to leave Joseph there in the cistern to die. But he had another design. Dr. Hackett says that near the ruins of Dothan there “are now large cisterns, such as in that country are liable to be left

dry.” Such was the condition of the one into which Joseph was cast.

Verse 25.—Sat down to eat bread. Significant words. They must have been hardened, or after such a business they would have had little appetite. Now they came in peace. He who troubled them is out of the way. His dreams are perhaps rehearsed at this fratricide festival, and made the theme of jokes and laughter. “Ha, ha, that standing sheaf. Rather low now, down there safe in the pit. A company of Ishmaelites came, etc. Dothan was, and still is, “on the great thoroughfare leading from Gilead, beyond the Jordan, to the great centre of traffic in the Valley of the Nile.” “From very early times a lively caravan trade was entertained between Syria and the East Jordanic provinces on the one hand, and Egypt on the other. Among the articles in peculiar demand, were all varieties of spicery and perfumes, required not only for the feasts and pleasure of the living, but for the embalming of the dead. The amount of spicery consumed for all these purposes was necessarily immense, and the caravan introduced in our narrative was exclusively laden with those costly commodities. The Ishmaelites—commanded by far the greatest part of the caravan trade. However, all those who carried on the same pursuits were designated by their name.”—Kautsch. A better explanation may be that the mass of the caravan were truly Ishmaelites, but the men who bought Joseph were Midianites, John xxv. 2, belonging to the caravan. Vs. 28.

Verse 26.—Reuben wished to save Joseph's life, and return him in safety to his father. Vs. 21, 22, 29. Judah wished to save his life, but like the rest, was glad to get him out of the way, to put him where his dreams of dominion over them, his elders, would not be realized. What profit? Leave him to die, and we get no money. That is the first point against the plan adopted. The second is finely urged in the single word brother, “our brother.” So he tries to stir their consciences and whatever natural affection envy has not burned out. The lie which was to be the crime's cover, is stated in verse 20. One sin was to lead on to another, as usual. But there was not much improvement in this respect in Judah's proposal. How did the deceit, of which Jacob in his earlier life was guilty, reappear in his children, and come back on the poor old man in judgment! The same low mean lie was to be told, but it was not to cover the same crime. Blood. Used instead of murder, because though here no blood was to be shed, as the lad was to be left to starvation yet from Cain's time blood was the symbol of death.

Verse 27.—We saw in the last verse from what he would dissuade his brethren. This shows to what he would persuade them. Sell him.—A little better than starving him. Chap. xlii. 21. Let not our hand be upon him, i. e., to slay him, immediately and certainly. Their hand was most wickedly and horribly against him to rob him, in all human probability, and according to their own conviction and intent, of all that makes life sweet and desirable to man. His brethren were content. Well they might yield so much as that. They carried their point, rid themselves of their troubles. So thought they, not God.

Verse 28.—How graphic! How sad! Joseph, when thrown in, may not have believed that it was really more than in sport. When pulled out, he may have thought the joke ended, but he knew so well what was meant by sale to these merchants. God pity the poor victims of man's heartless injustice! On the price, see Exodus xxi. 32; Leviticus xxvii. 5.

QUESTIONS.—The subject of our last lesson? Where did the family live? Vs. 14. What do you know of the place? Chap. xxxv. 27. To what place was Joseph sent? Vs. 12-14. For what? Where did he find his brothers? Vs. 17. What do you know of the place? 2 Kings vi. 13.

Vs. 23, 2. How did the brothers receive him? Was this their first plan? Vs. 18-20. How came they to change their plan? Vs. 21, 22. Why did they wish to put him away?

Vs. 25. What did the brothers do next? Could they have been truly happy? Where was Gilead? Where Egypt? Why were spicery, balm, etc., carried to Egypt?

Vs. 26, 27. What change of plan did Judah propose? For what reasons? Which acted the better part, Reuben or Judah? Was Judah's plan adopted?

Vs. 28. To whom was Joseph sold? For how much? What was the regular price for a slave? Ex. xxi. 32. See Lev. xxvii. 5. Had Joseph probably expected to be left in the pit? What was his feeling on being sold? Chap. xlii. 21.

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher's Scripture Catechism, 111, 112.

SUNDAY, April 27th.—The Lord with Joseph.—Gen. xxxix. 1-6, 20-23.

Youths' Department.

TO FARMER BOYS.

“I'm sick of hoeing in the corn, And following the plow; Of working hard from dewy morn Till eve, with heated brow, No longer will I stay to mow Or pitch the scented hay; To the great city will I go, Where wealth is gained by play.”

Tut, tut, my man hush up that song; Let wisdom be your guide; That dream of wealth may lead you wrong, And wreck you on the tide, Sit down with me upon this stone— Your team will make no harm; If we are not kings upon a throne, We are kings upon a farm.

God's healthy breezes round you blow, His birds your music make; And sweetest rest is yours, you know, When night doth overtake. The harvest will your toil repay; Those fields of waving grain Are growing through the sunny day And in the summer rain.

Men work as hard as you, in shade, O'er books and papers bent; The work of life is easy made Only by sweet content. It may be news, my friend, to you, But 'tis the truth I tell— All work is very hard to do, To those who do it well.

In speculation, you must stand The rough commercial shocks; You may in safety reach the land, You may land on the rocks. Your pay is certain on the farm, Though grain may not be sold; In panics you feel no alarm— Wheat is as good as gold.

Pick up your whip, and bid your team Drag on the noble plow, And do not let an idle dream Bedcloud your youthful brow. In years to come, when children roam, You'll take them by the arm, And say, “You'd better stay at home, Upon the good old farm.”

A BRIGHT DOG.

A shepherd once, to prove the quickness of his dog, who was lying before the fire in the house in which we were talking said to me, in the middle of a sentence concerning something else, “I'm thinking, sir, the cow is in the potatoes.” Though he purposely laid no stress on these words, and said it in a quiet, unconcerned tone of voice, the dog, who appeared to be asleep, immediately jumped up, leaped through an open window, and scrambled up the turf roof of the house, from which he could see the potato-field. He then (not seeing the cow there) ran and looked into the barn where she was, and finding that all was right, came back to the house. After a short time the shepherd said the same words again, and the dog repeated his look-out; but on the false alarm being a third time given, the dog got up, wagged his tail, and looked his master in the face with so comical an expression of interrogation, we could not help laughing at him, on which, with a slight growl, he laid himself down in his own warm corner, with an offended air, as if determined not to be made a fool of again.

“I can't, Sis, it's no use. I've tried over and over so many times, that now I don't want to try any more.”

“But, John, Jesus can help you,” said poor Agnes, looking sorrowfully at her brother, whom she was trying to lead to her Saviour.

“No,” said he “I've often heard people say he only helps those who want to be good.”

“But you want to, I'm sure, John.”

“No, I don't. I've tried so many times, and am just as bad as when I began; so now I don't even want to be good,” answered he, stubbornly.

“Oh, then,” said Agnes, whose faith led her to believe He could give any good thing, “Ask Him to make you want to want to be like Him.”—Child's Paper.

PRAYING AND WATCHING.

Is it not a sad thing that we should think it wonderful for God to hear prayer? Much better faith was that of a little boy in one of the schools in Edinburgh, who had attended a prayer meeting, and at last said to his teacher, who conducted it,—

“Teacher, I wish my sister could be got to read the Bible; she never reads it.”

“Why, Johnny, should your sister read the Bible?”

“Because, if she once read it, I am sure it would do her good, and she would be converted and saved.”

“Do you think so, Johnny?”

“Yes, I do, sir; and wish, the next time there is a prayer meeting, you would ask the people to pray for my sister, that she may begin to read the Bible.”

“Well, well, it shall be done, John.”

So the teacher gave out that a little boy was anxious that prayer should be offered that his sister might begin to read the Bible. John was observed to get up and go out. The teacher thought it very rude of the boy to disturb the people in a crowded room, and so, the next day, when the lad came, he said,—

“John, I thought it very rude of you to get up in the prayer meeting and go out. You ought not to have done so.”

“O, sir,” said the boy, “I did not mean to be rude; but I thought I should just like to go home and see my sister reading her Bible for the first time.”

Thus we ought to watch, with expectation, for answers to our prayers. Do not say, “Lord, turn my darkness into light,” and then go out with your candle as though you expect to find it dark. After asking the Lord to appear for you, expect Him to do so; for according to your faith, so be it unto you.—C. H. Spurgeon.

RESPECT FOR THE AGED.

One cold winter morning, when the sleet froze as it fell, rendering the walking dangerous even to the young and strong, my attention was drawn towards a man whose age and infirmity made it almost impossible for him to get along.

We were both walking in the same direction, but he was upon the opposite side of the street. I watched him with anxiety, fearing every moment that he would miss his footing.

Presently a beautiful young girl, richly and fashionably dressed, came down the street. Just as she was about to pass the old man, he slipped, and would have fallen, if she had not stretched forth her hand to save him.

She stopped a few moments to talk with him, then taking his arm, turned out of her way and led him home. What a contrast they presented! The young girl in her elegant attire, and the aged man in his worn-out garments.

It was a beautiful picture, an eloquent sermon upon the respect which the young owe to the aged.

I afterwards found that the old gentleman had once held a high position, but through no fault of his own had lost his property, and was then very poor and almost blind. How he must have prized the kind attention of the young girl, now that he was forsaken by the friends of his more prosperous days.

Perhaps we all need to be reminded of the Bible injunction: “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man.”

CHRIST'S PRESENCE.

The guests had all departed. Charles Wilcox and his younger brother Edward, stood alone together. The older brother looked sad, and was startled from his reverie when Edward said, “Charles, I am very glad you could get back in season for to-night.” “I was still more glad to come,” was the reply; “yet, though I have enjoyed this evening much, one thought, my dear brother, has constantly haunted me. You have attained what we called your ‘majority,’ but you have not yet, I fear, come to Christ. Edward, why won't you truly begin a new life?”

“Charles,” rejoined the other, “I have thought and tried to pray over what you said to me in your last letter; but I do not know how to find Christ; he seems a great way off.”

“If Jesus stood in this room, where I do, would you come to him?”

“Come to him! yes indeed, even if the whole world laughed me to scorn,” was the impetuous reply.

“Edward,” said Charles tenderly, “Christ is here, close by your side, only waiting for you to say, ‘Here I am, Lord, do with me as thou wilt.’”

Edward was deeply moved, and a look of joy overshadowing his face, he knelt down and said reverently, ‘Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.’ And the new life began.—Am. Messenger.

He who reigns within himself, and rules passions, desires, and fears, is more than a king.

A wag, in speaking of a blind wood sawyer, says that “while none ever saw him see, thousands have seen him saw.”

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

LETTER FROM ROME, ITALY.

Rome, March 14th, 1873.

Dear Brother Selden,—

I have just received your letter containing a cheque for £20 10s. 11d. sterling—(\$100 Dom.-currency), for our proposed chapel. How can I sufficiently thank you and the dear brethren who have come so nobly to our help? Our hearts overflow with gratitude to our Heavenly Father for having by His Spirit inspired you and your fellow helpers to assist us in this important undertaking. God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love which ye have shewed toward His name. He shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you “and join me in thanking you for your love in Jesus Christ. We have the same Lord, the same faith, and the same baptism. We are engaged in the same fight against superstition, error and sin.

The work here goes on amidst many difficulties and discouragements. Whilst we should not fail to trace in the development of the work the multiplied and unquestioned tokens of Divine goodness, we should be careful not to lay ourselves to the charge of boasting or exaggeration. There should be no attempt on our part to give fictitious embellishment to facts, or to throw upon them an excess of colour which would only tend to dazzle and mislead. This is usually the great mistake made by every new comer in the field. In his ignorance of the true condition of the country and his unacquaintance with the language and customs of the people, he becomes an easy prey to the designing hypocrite who with his flatteries spread before him a net in which he falls. The novice in Italian evangelization must ever bear in mind the sensible advice of the King of Israel to Benhadad, “Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off,” and also the solemn injunction of the apostle: “Be ye sober and watch unto prayer.” Sobriety of thought is ever a wholesome atmosphere to breathe. The “discerning of spirits,” is a gift of great value to the missionary, especially in a country like Italy, which is so completely under Jesuitical influence. Wolves in sheep's clothing frequently enter the fold and attempt to devour it. Evil workers are but too numerous, and we need to cry to the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth true and earnest labourers into his harvest. We urgently need an adequate band of courageous, self-denying and prayerful labourers—colporteurs, evangelists, and others, who shall go through the land circulating the Word of life and proclaiming in earnest and burning words the gospel of the Son of God. Pray for me and my colleagues, that we may be plentifully endowed with the Spirit that cometh from above. I feel more and more my own weakness and infirmities. It seems at times as if I must succumb under the trials, and the responsibility of my position. All I can do is to ask my dear brethren and sisters of Nova Scotia to pray earnestly and unceasingly for me, that “utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel to the poor deluded Romanists of Italy. Prayer ever leads to revived hope in every time of trial. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord of hosts.” Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase. Arms of flesh are not wanting in Rome. We have preachers, colporteurs, rooms for our meetings, each denomination has its representative here, Bibles and tracts have been distributed by the thousand, schools have been opened. What more do we need? An outpouring of God's Spirit. We have done but little as yet.—If God work not with us by His Spirit, our efforts are worse than useless: O for a universal and agonising cry of prayer for the manifestation, not of man's limited and feeble power, but of the omnipotence of God in convicting souls of sin and judgment to come and regenerating them by His Spirit. For my part I have never felt my weakness so much as I do now. Our meetings in the Trastevere are usually well attended, our school is in a flourishing condition, but I am not satisfied. My soul is troubled within me. All this is man's work. Rend the heavens, O Lord, and come down in